

bat use of the site, provided fall turbine curtailment is guaranteed. However, this study would have to be very carefully designed to ensure it is able to answer the questions we have regarding Indiana bat use of the project site. Ellen Lutz indicated they would only be willing to conduct additional studies if they received assurances in writing from the Service that they would receive project clearance when the studies were complete. Copeyon indicated that even if the studies did not facilitate a clearance, they would be helpful in preparing an HCP. Gamesa is not willing to do the studies if it would mean having to do a regular HCP, which Ellen Lutz estimates would take 3 years.

Tim Vought inquired about proceeding with certain aspects of the project without the benefit of an incidental take permit. This would include tree clearing when Indiana bats are not present, construction of roads, and placement of the turbines. This would reduce or eliminate the risk of take until such time as an ITP could be obtained – that is, around 2010 when the turbines would be activated (assuming additional bat studies in 2008 and 2009). Considering this would result in an irretrievable commitment of resources, the Service is not in a position to provide the company with a clearance letter for this approach. However, the section 10 (ITP) permit process is applicant-driven; therefore, it is Gamesa's decision as to whether or not to proceed with this approach.

Habitat quality at the Airtricity and Gamesa sites was briefly discussed. Airtricity has opted to locate almost all of their turbines on reclaimed strip-mine lands, where the quality of foraging and roosting habitat is currently very low. In contrast, the Shaffer Mountain site is forested and has a supply of potential roost trees. Chenger indicated that captures at the Airtricity site were 8 bats/mist net, while there were 15 bats/mist net on the Gamesa site. This likely coincides with the higher quality habitat on the Shaffer Mountain site.

Ellen Lutz stated that she still wants to have further discussions concerning the low-effect HCP option. Dave Densmore agreed to continue to explore this with the Regional Office, but cautioned that the categorical exclusion determination would be the key to this issue.

Ground broken on wind project

BY RANDY GRIFFITH
RGRIFITH@TRIBDEM.COM

DUNLO - Twenty-five new wind turbines on former Adams Township strip mines will not only produce clean energy, but also create jobs and new tax revenues.

"I think it's a win-win situation," township supervisors' Chairman William "B.J." Smith said Thursday at groundbreaking ceremonies for EverPower Renewables Corp.'s Highland Wind Project site.

"It will help to stave off some future taxes," Smith said.

Construction will begin immediately on the \$140 million project's first phase, to be completed

by December, company President Jim Spencer said at the ceremony.

The 25 turbines will produce 62 megawatts of electricity - enough to power 30,000 homes.



McGinty

At the same time, New York-based EverPower will work to restore the former strip mine.

"We are taking a brownfield site and turning it into a green site," Spencer said. "Wind is the future of energy generation."

Eight turbines will be on Highland Sewer and Water Authority property above the utility's secondary reservoir. Highland agreed to participate after investigating the environmental impact, Manager Ed Englehart said. All

plans have to be reviewed by Highland's engineers.

"We checked with our hydrogeologist," Englehart said. "He is firmly convinced they don't pose any environmental damage."

Opponents of another wind farm proposed for Shaffer Mountain have raised concerns about the construction's watershed impact and threat to endangered species.

Such development is always an environmental balancing act, said Secretary Kathleen McGinty of the state Department of Environmental Protection.

"We need to build a clean economy," McGinty said at the program.

"That's the answer to environmental problems. But for any

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particular project, we insist on thorough standards and a full and vigorous permit review. Nobody gets a free pass."

Developing clean, renewable energy sources such as wind power is vital to national economic security, McGinty stressed.

"This project is an environmental and economic home run."

KATHLEEN MCGINTY
DEP SECRETARY

"This project is part of the solution," McGinty said.

"This project is an environmental and economic home run."

She commended Adams Township officials for their work on regulations that encourage development while protecting residents.

"We've got a winning formula that starts with the local leaders, up through the Legislature and right to the governor," McGinty said.



JOHN TANISH/THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Jim Spencer, president of EverPower Renewables (center), talks with Rep. Gary Haluska (left) and state Sen. John Wozniak after the groundbreaking for the Highland Wind Project near Beaverdale on Thursday.

The project will create as many as 60 full-time construction jobs and sustain thousands more power-related jobs across the state, Spencer said.

Adams Township, Cambria County and Forest Hills School District will receive tax revenue.

A second, 25-turbine phase is in the works for next year, raising the Highland project's output to more than 130 megawatts.

That would make it the second-largest wind project in the state, Spencer said.